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Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

Letter dated 8 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to inform you that, following the sad passing away of Their late Majesties King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and King Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, the entire Nepalese people are in mourning. Therefore, I shall, as the head of the Nepalese delegation to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly, not be delivering the statement of Nepal in person.

I would therefore like to request you to issue the enclosed text of my statement as a document of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Murari Raj **Sharma**

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Annex to the letter dated 8 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Address by H.E. Mr. Murari Raj Sharma, Permanent Representative and Head of Delegation of Nepal to the special session of the General Assembly (New York, 8 June 2001)

I wish to begin by expressing, on behalf of His Majesty's Government and the people of Nepal and on my own, our profound gratitude to Member States for the deep tribute paid to Their late Majesties King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and King Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev at Their untimely passing away. Your sympathy and support will go a long way in helping us overcome the profound grief of this catastrophic tragedy.

Allow me, Mr. President, to congratulate you for the leadership and wisdom with which you have been conducting the work of the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). I also pay tribute to the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for the excellent preparations of the special session.

In Istanbul, we all agreed on two key goals: adequate shelter for all and development of sustainable settlements. Five years on, the Habitat II Agenda has helped developing countries to put in perspective the problems and policy environment of urban development, but there has been very little progress in implementing the agreed measures for lack of necessary resources and capacities.

Cities have been engines of growth, nerve centres of the information age, workshops of innovation and frontlines of interaction in a globalizing world. Today, the majority of the world population lives in towns and cities and that ratio continues to rise further. Thus, our overall social and economic well-being is intimately and progressively linked to healthy and balanced urban development.

In our time, ideas, people and goods travel, as do criminals and contraband, from one country to another through urban centres and they bind us all in virtually one chain of events and fortunes. It underlines the conspicuous need for a shared vision, goal and strategy to address the problems of cities.

Sustainable urban development is a challenge facing developed and developing countries alike, though to a different extent. If decaying inner cities have become a growing problem for advanced countries, insufficient and underdeveloped urban infrastructure and services to cater to a burgeoning urban population have been the crux of the problem in developing countries.

In both cases, urban infrastructure suffers, slums grow and crime rises, making cities less liveable. It clearly indicates that we must invest more in rural development to retain rural people by creating opportunities where they are, and in urban development to make cities safer and more vibrant.

In Nepal, nearly 14 per cent of the population lives in cities and towns, and that number is growing at a rate of 4.23 per cent. Urbanization has been largely

spontaneous and unplanned, with deficient services. Of late, we have evolved a National Urban Sector Strategy and National Shelter Policy to help orderly and efficient urban and shelter management.

Fortunately, 86 per cent of our people live in their own houses with clear title, leaving only a small percentage in need of protection for their tenure. Many rights of women, including inheritance for unmarried women and an equitable share of the husband's property for estranged wives, are accepted and largely observed.

Provisions of free secondary education and primary health care as well as micro-credit, remote area development and other grass-roots programmes to mainstream and uplift the weak and vulnerable are lending momentum to social transformation. Environment-friendly development and phasing out of polluting vehicles and industries from principal urban centres, such as the Kathmandu valley, have been the thrust of the Government.

From early 1990s, the democratic Governments have promoted partnership between the public and private sectors and recently, the Local Self-Governance Act has been enacted to empower people and strengthen local authorities for them to become a powerful force for change. Civil society is active in social and economic sectors, including the housing field.

The result of all these efforts has been positive. Economic growth has been sustained at 5 per cent over the past decade and absolute poverty has begun to slightly ease up.

Significant obstacles remain, however. A majority of our housing units in Nepal are substandard, unhealthy and highly prone to disasters. Progress towards gender equality, quality education, health and sanitation, protection for dwellers of rented accommodations and meeting the housing requirements of needy squatters is slow. And we house over 100,000 refugees. We do not have enough resources to invest in urban and rural areas to ensure cities without slums and villages without exodus. And promoting good governance, to which we are committed, takes its own time.

Pervasive poverty is at the root of most of our problems and reducing it is our highest priority. As a least developed country, our limited resources and capacities are no match for our daunting needs. While we strive our best to mobilize domestic resources and to learn from best practices, the global community must help us with increased flows of official development assistance, better trading opportunities, expanded debt relief and support for institutional development so that our people, living in urban and rural areas alike, can lead a decent and productive life.

Only with such support will poor countries such as Nepal be able to meet the goals of the Habitat Agenda.